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W.M.(41) 60TH CONCLUSIONS. MINUTE 3.

Confidential Annex.

(16th June, 1941 - 5.0 p.m.)

U.S.S.R.

(Previous
Reference:
W.M.(41) 59th
Conclusions,
Minute 2.)

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that, since the last meeting of the War Cabinet, he had again seen M. Maisky, and had informed him what we would do, if hostilities broke out between Russia and Germany. This had been supplemented by further information given by Sir Alexander Cadogan.

At the invitation of the War Cabinet Sir Stafford Cripps then made a statement on the present state of Soviet-German relations.

Soviet Policy
during the
last year.

Since he had been Ambassador the Soviet policy had been directed to maintaining peace with Germany. Fundamentally, the Soviet were hostile to both Germany and ourselves. Probably they regarded us as the more stable of the two, but Germany as the more dangerous from a short-term point of view. Within the last few weeks the Soviet had been subjected to increasing pressure from Germany, while the German Army had been concentrating on Russia's Western Frontier.

The facts were well known in Moscow. No attention need be paid to M. Maisky's denials in London. Stalin's decision to take over the office of Prime Minister was probably due -

- (i) to the need for placing the Higher Command on a war basis.
- (ii) to a belief that large concessions to Germany would be necessary, and that nobody but himself would be strong enough to make them.

Arguments from
the German
point of view
in favour of
an immediate
attack on
Russia.

The general belief in well informed circles in Moscow was that Hitler would pitch his demands so high that it would be impossible for the Soviet Government to accept them. His reasons for this might be as follows:-

- (a) In a year's time his own military position was likely to be weaker and the Soviet's stronger.

- (b) If he made war on Russia now he could count on considerable sympathy in certain quarters in the United States.
- (c) He might argue that his Russian campaign would be over in time to allow him to stage an invasion of the United Kingdom in the autumn.

**Soviet Policy
in the Present
Emergency.**

Sir Stafford Cripps said that in his judgment the Soviet Government would go to considerable lengths to appease Hitler. They were prepared to make both economic and territorial concessions, provided always that they still retained the economic and military strength to stage a "come back" before the end of the war. Failing that, they would fight now. Accordingly, any terms which included the partial disarmament of the Russian Army or Air Force would, he thought, be unacceptable; as would any economic concessions which included the surrender of Russia's granary (the Ukraine) or her main source of oil (Baku). The retention of Batoum and the other secondary oilfields would not make up for the loss of Baku. The installation of German technical control in the Russian factories would not necessarily be a casus belli. The Russian Secret Police could always be relied upon to eliminate outside control, if ordered to do so.

**Military
Efficiency of
the Soviet
Armed Forces.**

It was impossible for any foreigner to estimate the military efficiency of the Russian armed forces. The Army was in good heart. It possessed a considerable quantity of armoured fighting vehicles, but their quality was unknown. Sir Stafford Cripps said that his own guess was that the military machine might break down owing to failure of organisation and supply. The Russian Air Force was strong numerically. It was said to possess a formidable new fighter. Probably the Russian staff work would be poor.

All the young officers and young soldiers were imbued with a strong anti-German feeling.

The prevailing view in diplomatic circles in Moscow was that Russia could not hold out against Germany for more than three or four weeks. By the end of that time the enemy might be in Leningrad, Moscow and Kieff. It remained to be seen whether the Russian Armies on the Western Frontier would be able to maintain themselves in being, and to fall back on Siberia. The Russia railway system remained inefficient and the rolling stock was largely worn out. The prospects of the Russian Army extricating itself were therefore poor. Nevertheless, if any considerable part of it was able to reach Siberia, it might have a good chance of holding out. Militarily Siberia was a separate entity from European Russia.

In all probability the Russian Armies in Eastern Siberia could hold their own against a Japanese attack. They were regarded as the most efficient of the Russian Armies.

Advantages and disadvantages of a Russo-German conflict.

A German ultimatum to Russia was likely to have one of three results.

- (i) The Russians might surrender and become the vassals of Germany.
- (ii) The Russians might fight a short campaign and be defeated.
- (iii) They might be able to buy peace on terms which would not mean their military and economic subjection to Germany.

Of these (i) would be the worst and (iii) he thought the best for us.

Russian Oil.

If Germany obtained control of the Baku oilfield it would not be in her power to increase its output greatly. The oilfield was gradually becoming exhausted; hence the opening up of secondary oilfields. The Russians were now engaged in a campaign for building up their oil reserves. Before that campaign began their reserves had been estimated at between two and three million tons. Much of this was stored near the Volga. The annual surplus of production over consumption was estimated at only one million tons.

Miscellaneous.

In reply to questions, Sir Stafford Cripps made the following additional points.

- (i) If Russia were compelled to sign the Tripartite Pact her signature would be worthless.
- (ii) It was unthinkable that she should permit the Germans to march through her territory to the Middle East, since if they did so, they would occupy Baku on the way.
- (iii) In present circumstances the Soviet Government dare not adopt any but a strictly neutral attitude. There could be no question of their making an approach to ourselves. We ought to be in readiness, however, with whatever assistance we could give, after the outbreak of Russo-German hostilities.

THE FOREIGN SECRETARY said that he had just seen the American Chargé d'Affaires, who had told him how the American Ambassador in Moscow viewed the situation. His appreciation tallied very closely with that of Sir Stafford Cripps.

The War Cabinet thanked Sir Stafford Cripps for his statement.

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